

Woodland Management Plan

Collyhole, Gog & Magog Woods
Ipstones, Staffordshire Moorlands

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1. Vision

To cultivate a thriving, biodiverse native woodland that balances ecological restoration with sustainable forestry practices, ensuring long-term environmental health, economic viability, and social value for future generations.

2. Purpose

Why Woodland Management Matters

From the Forestry Commission blog at: <https://forestrycommission.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/13/why-woodland-management-matters/>

“Vital for biodiversity and nature recovery, [woodlands] also provide valuable ecosystem services such as delivering sustainable wood products, capturing carbon, helping to regulate the flow of water through our landscapes, and creating the perfect place for recreation and access to nature.”

“Threats to Woodland Biodiversity”

“Over past decades we have seen a decline in the condition of our woodlands and an associated decline in woodland biodiversity. Our woodlands can lack a diversity of structure, often not providing the vital deadwood and open spaces woodland wildlife depends upon. Dark, closed canopy woodlands can suppress the woodland understory and ground flora which prevents natural regeneration – integral to ensuring the next generation of hardy and resilient trees.”

3. Overview

3.1. Prior Management

Historically, there is evidence of a little quarrying/drift mining for, presumably, iron ore. Otherwise, there is no evidence of the woodland ever having been anything other than amenity. It seems that the woodland had not been actively managed for many years prior to our arrival in 2023. If trees had fallen, they had been left where they fell. The fishpond had been allowed to silt up, although the brook at the Belmont Road end had been straightened in about 2018, to alleviate historic flooding issues across Belmont Road. In Collyhole Wood in particular, numerous birch saplings had shot up and choked the light from the forest floor, negatively impacting on biodiversity on the forest floor, as well as stealing light from older trees and impacting their development. All three Woodlands are designated as Sites Of Biological Importance. Also known as Local Wildlife Sites.

3.2. Key Aims

Our management philosophy is one of a dynamic, hands-on approach, leveraging the collective energy and expertise of working parties, from solo visitors and couples to parties of a dozen or more individuals, prioritizing immediate needs and opportunities as they arise. While structured management has its place, our focus is on fostering a responsive, team-driven approach that allows for creativity, shared engagement, and a deep connection to the woodland. This approach ensures that progress is driven by passion and practicality, rather than rigid adherence to predefined timetables.

As such, our primary aim is to appreciate and enjoy the woodland, whilst working to maintain and enhance its ecological value in:

- Carbon sequestration
- Water regulation
- Support and enhance wildlife and biodiversity
- Providing space for recreation

3.3. Key Activities

During typically weekly smaller scale visits to larger monthly visits, we engage in a whole range of activities, encompassing:

- **Environmental activities**, which include removal of invasive species, control of competing vegetation, creation and maintenance of access tracks (including dead hedging to preserve deadwood and protect areas of forest floor for undisturbed growth), thinning to improve light through the canopy and to create/maintain space for older trees.
- **Economic activities**, which are currently limited to minimal extraction of firewood, with the intention to introduce coppicing and explore other light-touch possibilities in future.
- **Social activities**, which include recreational walks and forest bathing, bushcraft, and occasional camping.

The [Management Objectives](#) detailed later in this document provide more detail.

3.4. Key Challenges

There are just a few key risks/threats that we have identified to date:

3.4.1. Declining biodiversity

Lack of management for decades prior has resulted in a number of areas requiring intervention to boost biodiversity in different regions within the woodland as a whole:

- Bracken monoculture needs to be combatted in order to make space for more ground flora – this requires on-going activity for many years.
- Overcrowding of young saplings requires thinning in order to allow more light to the forest floor and to give older trees more space to flourish and develop into future veterans.

3.4.2. Presence of invasive species

Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed, and Rhododendron have all been identified within the woodland. Whilst not yet posing overwhelming challenges to remove, these require targeted intervention and persistent monitoring to effectively control them.

3.4.3. Lack of sufficient vehicular access

We are currently struggling with access to the woodland for workers and equipment required to carry out the management activities detailed within this document. As well as being somewhat unsafe, access is also inadequate for extraction of firewood and other lumber by trailer.

In terms of the access which we need in order to carry out our management plan, we currently have two separate means of vehicle access, from Belmont Road and from Church Lane respectively. The access from Belmont Road is very limited, both in scope and in potential, because it is not currently, and is unlikely ever to be, practical to use it for the removal of any timber or brushwood from anywhere other than the immediately surrounding area. This is because the existing access to it from the woodland lying behind it is via a steep, narrow and twisting pedestrian path, unsuitable for hauling

or wheeling logs of any size. There is no scope for widening this path, or for creating a new, parallel track, without major groundwork.

The other vehicle access is the one from Church Lane. The original access point, though, is not very safe, as the steepness of the slope immediately before exit onto the highway means that any vehicle has to keep moving to avoid stalling or slipping back down the slope. Unless you have someone standing in the road to indicate that there is no approaching traffic coming down the hill from the right, then the driver has to just go for it, as there is limited visibility to the right. Proposed wider access extends further down the hill, giving better visibility to the right, and the slope is less steep, meaning that a vehicle can exit more slowly and cautiously. So, for safety reasons alone, to manage the woodland effectively, an improved access at Church Lane is necessary.

4. Current Diversity

4.1. Trees

4.1.1. Magog Wood

Located at the Belmont Road end. Just over 7 acres. Consists largely of mature trees. What is marked on the OS map as a fishpond has long since silted up, and is now marsh and wet woodland, with quite a large number of alder (forming valuable carr for wildlife), birch and willow). Magog Wood has a number of very tall Scots pine, several mature and majestic beeches, larches, sweet chestnuts (including one veteran specimen), horse chestnut, mature sycamores, oaks of various ages, and an understory of holly, rowan, hazel, and willows, with plentiful pteridophytes.

4.1.2. Gog Wood

Located at the Church Lane end. Just over 5½ acres. Gog Wood is younger woodland, most of which is natural regeneration, containing some significant areas of mature and young silver birch. There are two open areas, both with bracken cover. Contains several large, mature coppiced sycamores. It also has a mixture of mature and young oak, some beech saplings, lots of holly, rowan and willows.

4.1.3. Collyhole Wood

Located at the Church Lane end. Just under 6 acres. Consists predominantly of oak and birch of varying ages. There is also some holly, rowan, sycamore, and beech, with willow and alder closer to the stream, thriving in the damper spots.

4.2. Plants throughout the Woods

There is one significant area of bluebells, which would be smothered by the bracken without intervention by us. There is another small area by the brook, adjacent to the pedestrian footbridge. Elsewhere, there is pink campion, wild primrose, wood anemone, wood sorrel, bugle, foxglove, violets, St. John's Wort, stitchwort, jack-by-the-hedge, herb Robert, honeysuckle, bilberry, wild raspberry, heather, plantains, mosses, lichen, fungi, plentiful ferns of various types, bryophytes, bramble, grasses and sedges, bracken, and nettle. There is one established but contained clump of rhododendron. The wet woodland has abundant marsh marigolds, reeds and other bog plants and, less welcome, Himalayan Balsam and, by the entrance to Belmont Road, there is a small area of Japanese knotweed, which we have already started targeting.

4.3. Fauna throughout the Woods

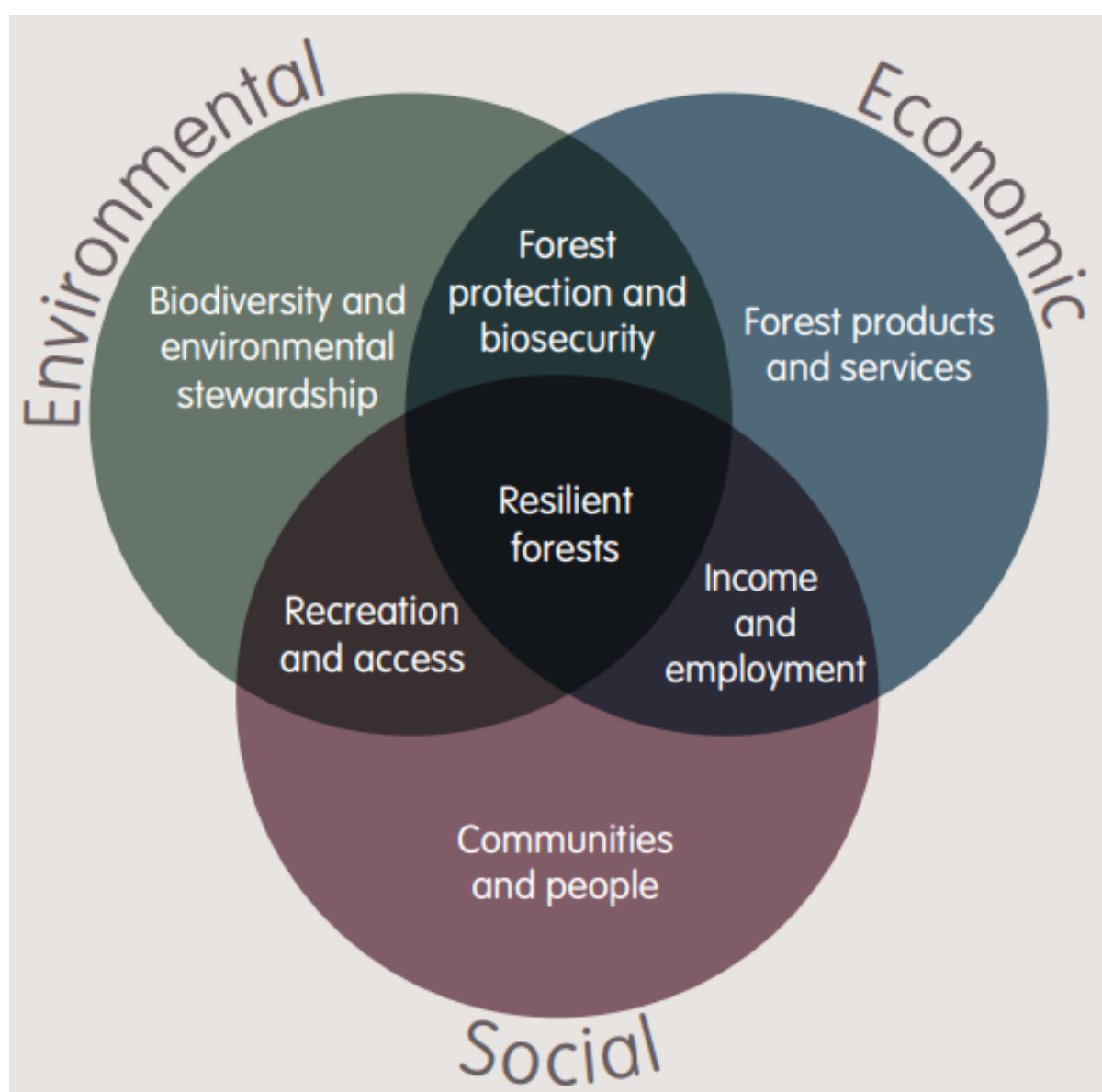
We have sightings of numerous mammals: red and roe deer, muntjac, foxes, hares, grey squirrel. Birds to date include a barn owl, tawny owls, greater spotted woodpeckers, tree creepers, jays, blackbirds, wrens, and various species of tits.

5. Balancing Objectives

From The UK Forestry Standard, the government's approach to sustainable forestry, at:

<https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2023/10/The-UK-Forestry-Standard.pdf>

“Sustainable forest management involves ensuring that the production of all forest and woodland benefits is maintained over the long term. This is achieved when the environmental, economic and social functions of forests interact in support of each other, as illustrated in the diagram [below]. The precise point of balance between environmental, economic and social functions will vary in individual forests in response to management objectives and local circumstances. The concept of balanced objectives is central to the approach of the UKFS.”



Currently, the majority of the management objectives are environmental in focus, as we seek to catch up with the lack of management activity over past decades. Nonetheless social activities are at the heart of our philosophy, so whilst we have not listed these activities as structured objectives, much of what we aim to accomplish is born out of a desire to reconnect to woodland habitats for our wellbeing, with our families, friends, and other groups. Economic objectives will be under review during 2025 since one of the owners has been recently made redundant from other work and will be assessing what role woodland management may play in his future employment.

6. Management Objectives

6.1. Regenerating the woodland ([FCWMA11](#))

Our long-term aim is to enhance the native, deciduous tree content of the woodland. Since there is an abundance of oak and birch saplings growing in various places, as well as some rowan, with some transplanting this young stock can be used in our regeneration work. With additional planting, we also plan to further increase the representation of hazel, willow, rowan, and sweet chestnut; and, in time, we hope to introduce blackthorn, crab apple, spindle, and hornbeam.

We are also keen to improve the overall biodiversity of the woodland, with regard to ground flora and associated pollinators, too, by reducing the density of bracken in key areas and increasing the amount of light reaching the floor in others.

We have also initiated some conversations about the potential for owl boxes, bat boxes, and bee hives, although we expect these additions to be further down the line. Prepare a biodiversity enhancement plan in conjunction which would include reparation/biodiversity gain for the work done at the entrance on Church Lane as well as the long-term enhancement of the entire woodland.

6.2. Selectively thinning trees ([FCWMA10](#))

To effectively regenerate the woodland, some competing trees, especially small silver birch saplings will be thinned. For example, a glut of birch and ash saplings in the northwest of Collyhole Wood are crowding the oak saplings there and inhibiting growth.

We have numerous thickets of holly and will ensure that the holly is controlled so as not to take a greater hold. With longer term management, we plan to balance out the diversity of the tree species to bring the birch population down to below 65%.

All thinning work will be carried out well within the limits of the quarterly felling quota, continuing our logbook of trees taken down.

As such, the thinning work represents many years of on-going work.

6.3. Processing timber for firewood ([FCWMA14](#) & [FCWMA16](#))

Some of the thinned trees will continue to be removed for firewood. Whilst this is far from a commercial operation, managing the seasonal storage, stacking, and collection of firewood is still a regular and significant undertaking, even within the quarterly felling quota.

6.4. Suppressing/removing competing vegetation ([FCWMA04](#))

There are two large areas of bracken on open hillside, both of which we plan progressively to reduce in extent. This will be done by pulling, rather than by chemical intervention or other means. Last year we made a good start, but bracken is pernicious and comes back, and this is a ten-year project. Even so, we saw some encouraging growth of the underlying grasses, and our main bluebell patch flourished.

6.5. Controlling and removing invasive species ([FCWMA07](#))

There is some Himalayan balsam, which will be controlled by hand pulling removal. There is a very small area of Japanese Knotweed, adjoining Belmont Road, which we are combatting by highly targeted use of glyphosate (which we squirt directly into the stems and root-systems of individual plants).

6.6. Maintaining and creating open space ([FCWMA08](#))

In addition to creating clearings around the largest oaks where birch saplings are in heavy competition for light, we also plan to survey & assess the canopy so as to ensure the recommended balance of open ground is created/maintained.

In order to introduce grasses and wildflowers to encourage butterflies and other pollinators, we intend to establish a small meadow clearing within Collyhole Wood, in due course.

6.7. Preserving deadwood ([FCWMA05](#))

Other fallen trees may, depending on their position, be cut up into logs, and any brushwood tidied. Some logs will be cleared away for firewood, but the majority will be left in piles to decay naturally.

A mature but dead horse chestnut by the parking apron at the Magog Wood end, adjoining Belmont Road, has just been felled, as it was potentially dangerous, given its position. A twelve-foot stump has been left for wildlife. The timber has been stacked – we may later take some for firewood once we are satisfied that any fungal infestation (of which there is clear evidence) is no longer active.

There are numerous standing deadwood trees in Collyhole Wood, which will be brought down and incorporated into dead hedges along with dead brushwood.

6.8. Managing woodland access tracks ([FCWMA01](#))

We would like to add an appropriate stone hardcore to the rear of the existing parking area adjoining Belmont Road, which is too soft to accept more than one vehicle, and we are applying for permission to improve and extend the access at the Church Lane end.

6.9. Maintaining public and permissive footpaths

We will maintain the existing right of way which runs roughly east-west. We also intend to continue to allow the use of the permissive footpath which runs north-south along the full extent of the woodland, subject to users not straying, and dogs being kept under close control.

6.10. Accommodating secure tool storage

Subject to necessary planning approvals, we plan to:

- Repair and reroof and install door the derelict brick shed for use as a store for simple tools.
- Site a shipping container as a larger secure tool store and shelter at the Church Lane entrance.

6.11. Supporting communal working parties

In Collyhole Wood, there is the beginnings of a gathering area for cooking & socialising between work. Further work is required to improve the area. A composting toilet is also required.

6.12. Protecting trees ([FCWMA02](#))

Where saplings are at risk of damage from grazing deer and other fauna, we install appropriate guards/fencing.

6.13. Coppicing ([FCWMA02](#))

New areas of hazel and willow are to be planted, starting first with planting along the fence line and in the previously bramble-overrun scrub area between the road and the stream where the main access area is. The intention is to develop a healthy planting of both from which to take cuttings in order to spread them to a number of areas and grow for streambank reinforcement and future coppicing.

6.14. Maintaining the waterways, ponds, and wet areas

We have no specific plans at the moment for the wet woodland, the former fishpond. The cut, representing the old line of the brook before straightening, runs close to the permissive footpath before turning right, parallel to Belmont Road, and rejoining the main brook. We can foresee that this cut will need dredging at some stage, which should eliminate any future risk of flooding. The brook itself is clean and flows well, and the adjoining wet woodland has capacity to absorb any temporary excess water flow.

At the Church Lane end, some work is required to address erosion of the stream bank. From conversation with locals, we've established that there used to be a number of pools down the length of the stream. We would like to work with Staffs Wildlife Trust and other local groups to explore the potential to reestablish these historical pools down the length of the stream in future years.

6.15. Maintaining fencing

Following any dredging at the Belmont Road end of Magog, we would wish to reinstate the existing roadside fencing alongside Belmont Road, which is wooden post and wire, and which has largely fallen over, no doubt assisted by being nudged by passing farm vehicles. The purpose would not only be to delineate the boundary, but also to prevent dogs entering the wet woodland area from the road or any dogs already in the wood (primarily ours, but anyone else's for that matter) rushing out onto the road and thus being a traffic hazard.

7. Stakeholder Engagement

- Immediate neighbours
- Local community relationships

- Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
 - Ipstones Parish Council
 - Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
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8. Progress Monitoring

Since we are driven by passion and practicality rather than rigid adherence to predefined timetables, we are not working to a specific calendar. Nonetheless, an annual review is scheduled in September to contemplate our progress and to prompt an update to include or amend any relevant changes.

Appendixes

A. Woodland Management Activities

From the Forestry Commission blog at: <https://forestrycommission.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/26/woodland-management-techniques/>

The “Reference” column has been added to provide a shorthand to link management activities in this plan to the FC activities listed below.

Activity	Description of Purpose	Reference
Manage woodland tracks	To allow machinery access for management activity	FCWMA01
Coppicing	Can result in the sale of wood products and encourage greater biodiversity	FCWMA02
Protect trees	Use tree guards and fencing to keep mammals away from your trees.	FCWMA03
Suppress or remove weeds	To get rid of competing vegetation to help young trees establish.	FCWMA04
Preserve deadwood	To support many species of insects, animals, plants, lichens, and fungi.	FCWMA05
Formative pruning	Can encourage straighter and taller trees for higher quality timber.	FCWMA06
Control and remove invasive species	By cutting, rolling, or using a herbicide treatment.	FCWMA07
Maintain and create open space	To let light reach the forest floor and encourage greater biodiversity.	FCWMA08

Protect ancient and veteran trees	Provide undisturbed growing conditions with adequate space and light levels.	FCWMA09
Selectively thin trees	For regular timber crop and to boost biodiversity by increasing light levels.	FCWMA10
Regenerate your woodland	Allow enough light and space in your woodland for young trees to self-seed.	FCWMA11
Restock your woodland	Plant diverse, climate resilient tree species - for a more structurally diverse and species rich woodland.	FCWMA12
Manage trees outside woodlands	To provide shelter for livestock and maintain vital wildlife corridors.	FCWMA13
Create space for off-road stacking	To allow timber to be safely collected by lorries.	FCWMA14
Prevent the spread of pests and diseases	Practice woodland biosecurity. Source biosecure trees, spot the early signs, report and remove infected trees.	FCWMA15
Fell trees on a rotational cycle	Followed by restocking of the felled area.	FCWMA16

B. Estimated Activity Efforts

Whilst there is no timetable to which we are working, the table below provides an indication of the level of work required to conduct a few of the most time-intensive activities associated with key stated management objectives. This demonstrates the need for continuous access to the woodland for parties of a dozen or so workers, year after year.

Activity	Outline Description of Work	Summary of Effort
Dead hedging	Around 1mi of footpaths in Collyhole Wood is to be dead hedged either side. Research suggests an efficient team of a dozen people might build a 1.5m high dead hedge on both sides of a 50m stretch of footpath in a day. At a more leisurely rate, with varied numbers of workers, depending on availability of material, and factoring in other objectives too, we anticipate working in weekend stints over a course of a number of years to achieve this. At this predicted rate, by the time we've completed the intended length, we will need to start over in order to bolster the earliest sections.	~5 years of regular weekend working parties of up to a dozen workers.
Bracken suppressing	Around 3 acres of bracken needs clearing to achieve a mosaic pattern of circa 50% cover. Research suggests that the rate of clearance for novice social teams is approximately 100m per person per day in the first year, and approximately half that to continue to pull the bracken in years 2 to 5 and possibly longer. For weekend working parties of a dozen workers through the growing season, five acres would take a year. Since this activity will be interspersed with other objectives, we estimate that it will be a recurring task spanning a decade or so.	5+ years of regular weekend working parties of up to a dozen workers.
Selectively thin trees	Hundreds of young birch saplings in Collyhole wood need thinning to get light through. Working within the quarterly felling quota restricts the number of trees to thin in any given window of time, but manually processing the trees is labour intensive. Once felled, limbing and bucking the saplings, and transporting the logs hundreds of metres across the woodland to the vehicle access point is time intensive. Experience suggests that a small number of workers, working at a gentle pace with safety paramount, will take something approaching a weekend every month to process the lumber. Owing to the number of saplings, this activity represents many years of work.	~10 years of monthly working parties of a few workers.